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ABSTRACT

The seriousness of the consequences of teenage pregnancy and parenthood results in substantial long-term costs to the public as well as immeasurable personal implications. Education may be one way to combat the deleterious effects. Since attendance at school seems to be the avenue for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to become self-sufficient and competent in society, priority must be given to connecting or reconnecting these adolescents to the school system. Since 1980, Ohio has been a pioneer in establishing intervention programs for pregnant and parenting adolescents, when the pilot program, Graduation Reality and Dual Role Skills (GRADS), was begun. GRADS is a vocational home economics in-school secondary program for pregnant students and/or young parents in grades 9-12 in comprehensive high schools and joint vocational schools. Although GRADS was initially funded through a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act Title IV Demonstration Project, vocational education unit funding supports it today. The program is individualized and has a four-part curriculum: a healthy pregnancy, responsible parenting I and II, and career development. Many GRADS programs offer enrichment programs and child care. GRADS students learn to become self-sufficient, secure persons; effective parents; and productive employees. (YLB)

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MONOGRAPH

TEENAGE PREGNANCY: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE SELF-SUFFICIENCY

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MONOGRAPH

Teenage Pregnancy: Educational Programs to Promote Self-Sufficiency

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THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND PARENTHOOD RESULTS IN SUBSTANTIAL LONG-TERM COSTS TO THE PUBLIC AS WELL AS IMMEASURABLE PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS.

Despite the media's extensive coverage of the epidemic of teenage pregnancy and parenthood in our state and nation, the fact that children are having children remains a harsh reality. The well-known statistic of one million pregnancies experienced by U.S. teenagers a year continues to place the United States ahead of all other developed countries in the rate of teenage pregnancies according to a report produced by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) in 1981. The United States pregnancy rate of 62 per 1,000 teens between the ages of 15-17 is more than half that of England, Wales, and Canada; three times that of Sweden and France; and nine times that of the Netherlands. By the time American women reach the age of 20, nearly one in ten will have been pregnant at least once. If there is no change in the current rates, four out of ten girls who are now 14 will get pregnant in their teens, two in ten will give birth, and three in 20 will have abortions (Guttmacher, 1981a). The United States is the only country where teenage pregnancy is increasing. There are approximately 1.3 million children now living with 1.1 million teenage mothers. Two-thirds of these children were born to mothers under eighteen (Guttmacher, 1981a & b).

How are these startling figures distributed across our nation? According to the Children's Defense Fund (1985), nine states account for 50 percent of all births to teens. They include California, Texas, New York, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Georgia. These same nine states also account for 50 percent of all births to white teens. Eight states account for 50 percent of all births to black teens: New York, Texas, Illinois, Florida, California, Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina.

It does not take a statistician to notice that Ohio stands out in two of the three categories above. In the latest report of vital statistics by the Ohio Department of Health (1985), Ohio reported a total of 158,697 live births in 1983. Children between the ages of 11 and 15 had 381 live births, and children between the ages of 15 and 19 had 21,839 live births. Fourteen percent of the total live births in Ohio in 1983 were to children under the age of 20. Five counties led the state in live births to mothers under 20 years of age. These five counties are Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Montgomery. The five counties reporting the lowest figures of live births to children under 20 years of age were Harrison, Monroe, Noble, Putnam, and Vinton. According to the national figures, 96 percent of white and virtually all black mothers kept their children rather than surrendering them for adoption (AGI, 1981).

With nine out of ten pregnant teenage girls becoming single parents and raising their babies themselves, support and aid from the family of origin is often minimal (Green and Potteiger, 1977). This translates into a heavy reliance upon public assistance programs for financial, medical, and social support. As a result, these children born to children face a bleak future.

The seriousness of the consequences of teenage pregnancy and parenthood results in substantial long-term costs to the public as well as immeasurable personal implications (Furstenberg, et al., 1981; Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), Resource Center on Sex Equity, 1984). According to Sol Gordon of Syracuse University, "Every single index of pathology in society is related to being born to a too-young mother ... whether child abuse, delinquency, alcoholism, or drug abuse [it] shows a positive correlation with being born to a teenage mother" (Gordon cited in Dickman, 1984, p. 4).

Over half of all Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments goes to families where the mother was a teenager when her first child was born. Children of teenagers often disproportionately populate the Head Start and Chapter 1 programs and are more likely to need special education services (CCSSO, 1984).

The economic and social effects upon society are staggering, but the personal suffering is even more astonishing. Pregnant teens often deny pregnancy, thereby delaying prenatal health care. Delaying health care and being physically immature themselves increase the likelihood of greater risks to themselves and to the unborn child during pregnancy. Walters, McKenry, and Walters, (1979), report that the high mortality and morbidity rates in the United States are the result of so many births to very young adolescents. Teen mothers are more likely than those who delay childbearing until their 20's to have babies that are premature or of low birth weight, to miscarry, or to deliver stillborns. These poor health conditions can lead to many disabling conditions later in life. In addition to welfare dependency, poverty, and the health risks, the birth of a child to a teenager also brings a high degree of emotional stress, family breakdown, child abuse, forced marriage, marital instability, low academic achievement with increased dropout rates, and low-paying jobs (AGI, 1981; Card, 1981; Furstenberg, et al., 1981; Trussell, 1981; Walters, McKenry, and Walters, 1979). The Alan Guttmacher Institute also estimates that over 800,000 of the 1.3 million children of teenage mothers are in need of child care, a fact that severely limits the educational and employment opportunities of these young mothers.

The problem of low academic achievement is supported in the 1985 findings of the Children's Defense Fund. The report indicates that less than ten percent of mothers 15-17 years of age completed high school in 1981. In addition, 54.1 percent of teens in the nation who gave birth at age 18 or 19 had completed high school compared to 84.4 percent who gave birth in their twenties (Children's Defense Fund, 1985).

The educational consequences are twofold. Young mothers and some young fathers do not gain the educational knowledge and skills necessary in our contemporary society to be self-supporting, economically productive, and emotionally and socially mature citizens. And since their own growth has been stunted, their children often fail to develop the trust, initiative, and autonomy needed to become self-controlled, secure, independent, and productive adults in our society. Thus, if this cycle is not broken, these children of children will often enter the world with serious economic, emotional, social, and developmental disadvantages (CCSSO, 1984; Dinkle, 1984; Furstenberg et al., 1981).

SINCE ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL SEEMS TO BE THE AVENUE FOR ACQUIRING THE NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT AND COMPETENT IN OUR SOCIETY, PRIORITY MUST BE GIVEN TO CONNECT OR RECONNECT THESE ADOLESCENTS TO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

What can be done then to help combat the deleterious effects of teenage pregnancy and parenthood? One solution is almost too obvious. Since attendance at school seems to be the avenue for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to become self-sufficient and competent in our society, priority must be given to connect or reconnect these adolescents to the school system. Only by completing high school can pregnant and parenting adolescents have the opportunity to learn how to care for themselves and their children; to learn the necessary skills to live the multiple roles of student, parent, and employee; and to have the opportunity to identify and train for a satisfying career and receive the financial returns that go with it. If this can happen, these children may have a better start at becoming and also at preparing their own children to become independent and productive members of their communities.

Sadly, though, as statistics have shown, these children do not complete their high school education. Before Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 which prohibits sex discrimination for pregnancy-related reasons against students and employees in federally assisted educational programs, many school systems across the nation often encouraged this particular population to be removed from regular classroom settings once the problem of pregnancy or parenthood was identified. This approach was found to be not only discriminatory, but also less than effective, because it stopped services at exactly the point when the most severe difficulties arise and the most desperate need for assistance occurs. Because of the frequency with which pregnant and parenting teens terminate their education, how schools deal with this issue is critical (Groves, 1985).

Since 1980 Ohio has been a forerunner in establishing intervention programs for pregnant and parenting adolescents. The Home Economics section of the Division of Vocational and Career Education, Ohio Department of Education, began a pilot program in three schools called Graduation Reality and Dual Role Skills (GRADS). GRADS is a vocational home economics in-school secondary program for pregnant students and/or young parents in grades nine to twelve in comprehensive high schools and joint vocational schools. In the 1984-1985 school year the program increased from 16 to 27 programs serving approximately 1,244 students across 70 schools. During the 1985-1986 school year the program grew from 27 to 39 programs serving approximately 108 schools (GRADS Annual Report, 1985).

According to the GRADS Resource Guide (1982), the major goals of this program are as follows:

1. To increase the likelihood that participants will remain in school during their pregnancy and after they give birth.
2. To assist participants in carrying out positive health care practices for themselves and their children in both prenatal and postnatal stages.
3. To provide knowledge and skills related to child development and positive parenting.
4. To provide an orientation to the work world at large and in the local community.

GRADS was initially funded through a CETA Title IV Demonstration Project granted to the Vocational Home Economics section of the Ohio Department of Education in October, 1980. When CETA funds were not available for the 1981-1982 school year, the program was supported by vocational education unit funding which con-

tinues to be the funding source today. Male and female students who enroll for one year in the GRADS instructional program may be eligible to earn credits toward graduation. Based on individual needs, students may enroll in GRADS for a maximum of two years.

SINCE 1980 OHIO HAS BEEN A FORERUNNER IN ESTABLISHING INTERVENTION PROGRAMS FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING ADOLESCENTS.

There are two basic structures to the GRADS program. Structure A — a GRADS teacher-coordinator teaches daily GRADS classes at one or two high schools. Structure B — a GRADS teacher conducts classes at a JVS or career center site as well as local feeder schools one or two times weekly. The differences in these instructional programs are based upon logistics, local student populations, and local services to assist pregnant adolescents and young parents. A vocationally certified home economics teacher coordinates the classroom, community activities, services, and resources for the students.

There are several unique features to the GRADS program. One is the individualized nature of the program. An approved curriculum developed with statewide representation is chosen cooperatively by the teacher-coordinator and the students, thereby meeting the individual and unique needs of each student. The curriculum is divided into four parts: a healthy pregnancy; responsible parenting I and II; and career development. Another unique feature is the time provided for the teacher-coordinator to interact with students and their extended families outside the school environment and with supportive community agencies and organizations.

For additional information concerning the structure, funding, or implementation procedures for a GRADS program contact:

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Many GRADS programs throughout the state provide excellent services that enrich and enhance the lives of pregnant and adolescent parents and their extended families. Martha Ewing, the teacher-coordinator at Pickaway-Ross JVS, Chillicothe, has worked with the GRADS program since its inception in 1980. Mrs. Ewing teaches classes at the JVS two days a week and serves four of the ten feeder schools the remaining three days — one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Like all GRADS teachers, Mrs. Ewing's main goal is to help each student remain in school. Guidance counselors, summer school, night school, and correspondence courses are all utilized so the student can finish school and find employment. A unique addition to this year's program is a portable VCR received through a grant from the local chapter of the March of Dimes and a 13-inch color TV donated by the local RCA plant. This equipment expands program offerings to supplement regular classroom activities. A future program need is for an additional coordinator to serve the remaining feeder schools.

An overwhelming task for GRADS teacher Sandra Rumer at Taft High School, Cincinnati, is to develop an individualized program of learning designed to span the period from enrollment through graduation. With 63 students currently enrolled in GRADS (four are from vocational classes, two are males, and four are special education students) this is indeed an overwhelming goal. Students are working with materials to learn more about their stage of pregnancy or age of their child.

A unique after-school activity this year was a three-month program for parents and their babies. The "Babies Milk Fund," a community agency, funded a parenting class each week. This is a wonderful example of how a school and the community it serves can cooperate to provide support services for adolescent parents. The Taft program has also invited speakers from the community to address topics such as Sickle Cell Anemia, nutrition (WIC), lessons on reality (directed by a former teenage parent), and child abuse and neglect. The local family service agency is presently working with Mrs. Rumer to develop a program to increase self-esteem. As with other GRADS programs across the state, there is a continuing need to find adequate, low-cost, accessible child care. Often the dropout rate is high due to inadequate, inappropriate, or inaccessible child care.

LEARNING TO BECOME A SELF-SUFFICIENT, SECURE PERSON, AN EFFECTIVE PARENT, AND A PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYEE HELPS NOT ONLY THE GRADS STUDENTS BUT ALSO THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THEY LIVE.

At another joint vocational school, Ohio-Hi Point JVS, Bellefontaine, teacher Linda Goff directs a once-a-month day-long seminar for GRADS students as part of the overall classroom based structure. During the seminar students from the JVS and eight feeder schools hear professional speakers address topics such as self-esteem, child care, parenting, and stress. The seminar also allows students to share thoughts and feelings with other teenage parents. Another program sponsored by GRADS at Ohio-Hi Point JVS is a self-esteem panel provided for junior students. According to Mrs. Goff, the panel of professional people spend a day with the students and answer questions concerning drugs, sex, alcohol, family, and the law. Future plans include inviting the entire junior class to the self-esteem panel and to have access to a computer system.

In another part of the state, the Akron Public Schools GRADS teacher, Carol Kowach, coordinates the program at Buchtel and Kenmore High Schools. Mrs. Kowach served over 60 students with children and a parent-teen center provides special classes for pregnant teens on a volunteer basis. A nursery for GRADS students' children is a special addition to this program. It serves 14 infants of high school parents. Students are active in Future Homemakers of America, Inc. (FHA/HERO), the vocational home economics student organization, and have collected over 1,000 Heinz baby food labels to donate to the Children's Medical Center to support its program to secure "Special Friends" for students. Once-a-month field trips to such places as Ronald McDonald House, Children's Library, Hattie Larlham Foundation, Toy

Lending Library, speech and hearing clinics, and Akron University day-care add motivation and interest in the GRADS program. Child care, appropriate role models through Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Akron, information about infant nutrition, and an information system between the eight high schools and the teen parent center are some of the goals Mrs. Kowach is continuing to develop.

In the Gallia-Jackson-Vinton VEPD, Meta Van Nostran coordinates three different classes to meet the needs of pregnant and parenting students. Topics include prenatal care, parenting skills, and a combination of work and family topics. This year a day-care program was implemented for eight infants. In addition, two single parent and homemaker grants from the Division of Vocational and Career Education this past year provided transportation to a day-care center as well as resources and learning materials related to work and the family.

Career exploration and planning projects jointly sponsored by the Hawthorne Center in Dayton, Buckeye Trails Girls Council, and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority provide an opportunity for Dayton city teenage parents to examine their skills and abilities, career interests, and possible career choices. The Hawthorne Center is an alternative volunteer program for the adolescent parent. In addition to vocational training and academic subjects required for graduation, the center provides extensive health and counseling services along with instruction in decision-making and problem-solving skills. Child care for infants from two weeks to preschool age is also provided. According to the coordinator, Joyce Willis, the center also offers tutoring for the learning disabled and developmentally handicapped students.

The quality of all GRADS programs in the state is evaluated each year under the auspices of the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Vocational and Career Education, Home Economics section. However, many needs are often left unanswered due to logistics or finances. There is a continuing need for accessible and appropriate day-care, a way to encourage the fathers to participate in the programs, greater flexibility of schedules, and parent and community support.

Although pregnant and parenting adolescents come from many backgrounds and socio-economic levels, they have two areas in common: all are either about to become parents or already are parents, and many wish they would have waited. Staying in school is a priority for GRADS students. GRADS programs in high schools and joint vocational schools are helping these teens meet the challenge of giving birth at too young an age. The knowledge and skills these students learn are invaluable. Learning to become a self-sufficient, secure person, an effective parent, and a productive employee helps not only the GRADS students but also the communities in which they live.

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